

10 CAMDEN PARK AREA

10.1 Context

Setting

- 10.1.1 Camden Park shares many characteristics in its setting with Calverley Park, the dramatically successful model that inspired it. The approach to it from the town centre is direct – a straight line up Grove Hill Road and Camden Hill, and then at the park entrance the urban character of the town changes abruptly into the relaxed, green grounds of the development. Extensive villas settle into this well managed setting with apparently minimal disruption to trees and gardens.
- 10.1.2 The most distinctive element of the setting is provided by “The Meadow”, which has a very rural – almost agrarian - character. This central landscape is significantly distinct in character from its equivalent at Calverley Park: at Camden Park it is pastureland grazed by cattle. Here it also serves an illusory function for the villas which front onto it: the residents of the houses grouped around the open space gaze out on to what looks to each villa to be their own ancestral acres.

Historical background

- 10.1.3 Legal records indicate that the first five plots (1 – 5 Camden Park) were conveyed in about 1856, but that Lord Camden was having the east and west lodges built at the time of the 1851 census. As the owner of the estate, he was no doubt encouraged to develop it by the success of Camden Park, and probably also by the completion of the railway and station (to which Grove Hill Road connects Camden park directly) in the 1840s.
- 10.1.4 The plan, begun in 1846, was very specific about building types and uses, the one-acre plots, and the kind of planting (to exclude forest trees) permissible in private gardens. Some years later, papers on the disposal of the estate and some plots in Camden Park show that there was pressure to build houses of lesser standard. Such moves were resisted, and the estate that exists today owes much of its quality to the foresight of the earliest covenants protecting its development. In its execution it seems likely that William Willicombe was responsible for much of the architectural design: certainly his construction firm laid the drainage.

Architectural and historic qualities

- 10.1.5 As at Calverley Park, landscape is dominant in Camden Park. It provides both a setting for the elegant classical villas and an Arcadian outlook from them: a fine amenity for the relatively private enjoyment of its well-to-do residents.
- 10.1.6 Between Calverley Park and Camden Park lies a higher density area of terraces and paired houses. The main area is served by Prospect Road, which is an important route into the southern town centre following from Pembury Road. Cambridge Street and Princes Street form a distinct little neighbourhood of stuccoed painted houses, rising up the slope towards the Camden Park Estate, from which they are separated by a high boundary wall. South of Camden Hill the unadopted streets of Poona Road and Cambridge Gardens are made up of small houses and terraces of very varied architectural characteristics. The scale of the streets and the mixture of 19th century styles create a village like character.

10.2 Special identity areas

Prospect Road

- 10.2.1 The strong linear character of Prospect Road is emphasised by the heavy stone walls of Calverley Park on the west side (which are listed structures) and retaining walls on the east, and by the front gardens of the Prospect Road properties, whose boundary walls and planting rise above the general level of the street. These features are further reinforced by the mature planting in the rear gardens of Calverley Park and by a very consistent building line to the houses on the east side. Original brick footways remain. The junction with Pembury Road and Calverley Road at the north end is made an especially strong location by the stone estate walls that form key junction corners, even though there are elements here, like the Salvation Army Citadel, that intrude as unsympathetic building forms. At the south end, no. 92 Grove Hill Road and its neighbours are a very distinctive group that provide a focus to southward views along the street.
- 10.2.2 Cambridge Street and Princes Street rise steeply from Prospect Road with stuccoed houses to a very consistent range of classical designs, painted in pastel shades. Generally the paint schemes are restrained, but some are over-fussy with mouldings picked out in contrasting colours, and there are the inevitable quirks where different schemes abut on connected properties. The houses have short front areas and little screening planting, and most have bay windows and strongly moulded details so that, in a relatively narrow street with car parking on both sides, the scene is busy (particularly in Cambridge Street). By contrast, the top of Prince's Street lacks enclosure and focus where the wall to Camden Park unceremoniously cuts it off.
- 10.2.3 Poona Road and Cambridge Gardens, although of a similar scale and age, have a quite different character. Here individual expression by paint colour is less necessary, as there is a much greater range of house types. Nevertheless, the heavily rusticated block at Regency House is currently presented in an extremely strong dark blue. Unmade road surfaces and overhanging greenery add to the informality. Poona Road in particular reduces to the merest track, serving cottages at nos. 15 and 16 that overlook the Claremont School fields. The corner buildings in Grove Hill Road (nos. 90-92, see 10.2.1 above) are a particularly attractive early 19th century group of both variety and consistency, in 2 and 3 storey brick, with painted stucco details and paned windows. Their neighbours, nos. 86-89, are a contrasting stuccoed pair with a well preserved ironwork balcony and canopy to the first floor.

Camden Park

- 10.2.4 Moving along Camden Hill from Grove Hill Road, Crocodile Lodge to the right (and its eccentric crocodile sculptures!) marks the key entrance point into Camden Park. At this point that the distinctly different character of the park compares so strikingly with the relatively dense residential development adjacent to it.
- 10.2.5 No.1. Camden Park, known as Salesmere, is one of the first group of five houses built in development in the 1850s. It is in an Italianate style (typical of Willicombe, although not proven to be by him) with a tower and contemporary conservatory.



Camden Park

- 10.2.6 The road has an informal character, which should be maintained in this style. Surfacing materials include brick pavements, ragstone spill drainage channels and stone kerbing. This character is enhanced by the significant boundary planting and the separate gardens on the western side of the road opposite no's. 1- 3. Retaining and boundary walls are to be found all along the road, and this greatly enhances the sense of enclosure.
- 10.2.7 A significant amount of modern infill development has taken place during the latter half of the 20th century and this has impacted upon the historic character of the area. Where the character of the original houses is to recede into the planting and landscape of their surroundings, more recent additions tend to stand out. Design factors include the loss of planting cover and the arrangement of frontage areas for car parking rather than as gardens, as well as the plainer architectural forms and detailing.
- 10.2.8 Of particular note is the view of the original villas set amidst the verdant landscaping of The Meadow. This view is enhanced by the elegant spire of St. Peter's Church to the north in the Windmill Fields area.



St. Peter's Vicarage, Camden Park



The Meadow, Camden Park

10.3 Summary of the elements that contribute to the area's special character.

Key townscape groups

- 10.3.1 Like Calverley Park, while the character of Camden Park is distinctive, it is not one that is created specifically by its built form. Each individual house has architectural interest, but the parkland setting of the whole area allows the buildings to recede into the background, while providing a consistent scale and style.
- 10.3.2 In areas adjacent to Camden Park there are notable building groups at 90 and 92 Grove Hill Road, providing a terminating focus to southward views along Prospect Road, and at 4, 5 and 6 Camden Hill, which provide a strong framing element in the vista from Camden Hill into Camden Park at its entrance.

Key spaces

- 10.3.3 As at Calverley Park, the visual quality of Camden Park is established by an overall environmental ambience which is a combination of a fairly low density built form and a consistent landscape character that links it all together. The key space, albeit a loosely contained green area, is The Meadow.

Views

- 10.3.4 The key landmarks are the spires of St. James' and St. Peter's churches, which are visible from almost every direction in the town, often from a considerable distance. The topography has been exploited in laying out these areas, with the main spines lying along spurs of higher ground emphasising the prominence of the spires. Otherwise, the dense green garden planting hides most of the area from view. Within the park, No's 1-5 combined with their setting amongst mature boundary planting when viewed from across The Meadow form a distinctive group.
- 10.3.5 Narrower vistas are important in the approaches to Camden Park, for example from Camden Hill into Camden Park at its entrance. Prospect Road provides a key vista south to 90 and 92 Grove Hill Road and also north to Pembury Road

10.4 Summary of elements that detract from the area's special character

- 10.4.1 The area remains almost exclusively residential, and the main threats to it come from inappropriate detail and design. The retention of green cover is essential, and it has mitigated some of the worst visual intrusions. However, it is not a substitute for good design, and development in the area must take account of the relationship between buildings and their mature landscape setting.

Loss, damage and intrusion

- 10.4.2 Within Camden Park modern infill development, with associated structures such as garages and gates, have intruded upon the historic character. Outside there is some risk of unrestrained and inappropriate colour schemes in the decoration of stuccoed houses, particularly in the Cambridge Street and Princes Street